

IDAHO FALLS POST REGISTER

Saturday

UI opens cattle research station on 1,100-acre ranch

By The Associated Press

SALMON -- With the donation of an 1,100-acre ranch and more than 100 heifers, the University of Idaho has launched what school President Tim White says will be the premiere research facility for cattle and ranching operations in the Pacific Northwest.

The Moscow-based school took ownership of the ranch six miles north of the town of Salmon on Thursday, opening its first new agricultural research station in 20 years.

It will be called the Nancy M. Cummings Research, Extension and Education Center in honor of the Arco woman who died in 1995 after moving to the spread between the Salmon River and the Continental Divide.

"My mom would have loved this," said her daughter, Sherrie Auen, who with her husband, Ron, donated the property to the university on behalf of a family foundation. "The goal is to have a long-term impact on Salmon and to make a difference to the community."

The Auen Foundation also paid for construction of a new classroom building, fences and an upgrade of the irrigation system. Area ranchers donated the first head of cattle, and UI faculty and students have started research projects at the ranch.

"I assure you that we will be good stewards of your ranch," Carl Hunt of UI's College of Agriculture told family members during a dedication ceremony at the ranch.

Research will include studies on using radio tracking devices to monitor cattle from ranches to feedlots and packing plants, as well as determining how genetics may affect meat quality and taste. The center also will monitor rangeland health factors, including water quality and noxious weeds.

The center's herd breeding development is focused on black baldy cattle, a cross requested by Idaho producers. Leaders of the state's beef cattle business say a research station focusing on their trade has been long needed.

"The cattle industry is a billion-dollar tax-receipt industry, but we've been the only commodity group without a research center," said Idaho Cattle Association president-elect Mike Webster of Roberts. "When the potato industry has questions or trouble, they can call Aberdeen."

The university's research and extension center in the southeastern Idaho community of Aberdeen focuses mostly on potatoes and has about 80 full-time employees.